

Blighted Property Review Committee
Tuesday, May 6, 2008
Minutes

Members Attending: L. Olsen, W. Bealer, M. Wolfe, M. Candelario, S. Fuhs

Staff Attending: J. Khokhar, C. Younger, L. Kelleher,

Others attending: N. Brantley

Mr. Olsen called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

Public Comment

There were no requests for public comment from those present. Mr. Brantley, from the Community Garden Coordinator of the Berks County Conservancy, stated that he was present to observe.

Approval of the Agenda and the April Meeting Minutes

Mr. Olsen asked the Committee to consider the agenda for this meeting and the minutes from the March meeting.

Ms. Wolfe moved, seconded by Mr. Candelario, to approve the agenda for this meeting and the minutes from the April meeting as presented. The motion was approved unanimously.

Blighted Property Forums

Ms. Kelleher stated that visits to Harrisburg and Allentown are planned for Tuesday, May 20th and Monday, June 9th, respectively. The Harrisburg trip is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. and the Allentown trip is scheduled for 4:30 - 7:30 p.m. She stated that due to a Council meeting on June 9th, she will only be attending the Harrisburg trip.

Ms. Kelleher explained that the itinerary for the trips would be identical. The visit will begin with site visits to properties handled by the Harrisburg and Allentown BPRCs. After the site visits, the group will be sitting in on their BPRC meetings, which are expected to last approximately 15-20 minutes. Discussion with the committees will follow the meetings. She explained that staff from Allentown will also be visiting with Harrisburg on May 22nd and staff from

Harrisburg will be joining the visit to Allentown. She noted that Allentown and Harrisburg are very excited about this opportunity.

Ms. Kelleher asked who from the Committee would be attending the Harrisburg trip. Mr. Candelario, Mr. Olsen, Ms. Wolfe and Mr. Bealer announced their intent to travel to Harrisburg along with Mr. Khokhar, Ms. Mayfield and Ms. Kelleher. Mr. Fuhs stated that he has a conflicting appointment but will try to rearrange his schedule. Ms. Kelleher stated that an invitation was also extended to Mr. Kramer from the Center for Local Government. He will be attending as his schedule permits.

After a brief discussion the group decided to meet at Mr. Olsen's business at 8:30 a.m. Mr. Olsen stated that those traveling could leave their cars in the lot. The group will be carpooling with Mr. Olsen and Mr. Bealer who graciously offered to drive.

The group decided to meet at Mr. Olsen's business and leave for Allentown on June 9th at 2:30 p.m. Mr. Miller and County CD Director Ken Pick will be attending the visit to Allentown.

Updates

1. GIS Mapping

Mr. Olsen reported that he and Mr. Bealer completed the GIS training provided by Ian Chapman from the City IT Department. Mr. Bealer stated that the ADD information along with the properties demolished by the City needs to be added to the program provided by Great Valley. He stated that adding this information will take some time. He noted that this program also does not provide the density information that was originally desired. He explained the difficulties in extracting density information from the program. Mr. Khokhar stated that this program will need constant updating as properties are rehabilitated and demolished. Mr. Bealer stated that he will work with Mr. Pick and Mr. Chapman to gather and add the ADD information.

2. Blighted Property Revitalization & Reclamation Act

Ms. Mayfield was asked to provide a report on the City's ability to enact legislation modeled after that currently being considered at both the federal and state levels. Mr. Younger stated that Ms. Mayfield expects to provide this report at the next meeting. Mr. Candelario requested that Ms. Mayfield also provide a summary of this legislation.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the letters to the state and federal legislators have not been completed.

3. Rehabilitation Programs

Ms. Kelleher stated that the Council Office intern, Ms. Conway, has started to develop the list of programs available to property owners. A sample was attached to the agenda packet. The majority of the available programs focus on homes that are owner occupied. The City's facade program and the loan program offered by Citizen's Bank are available to all property Ms. Kelleher reported that it would take approximately one or two months to complete this assignment.

Ms. Kelleher reported that the CDBG Budget provides the following allocations:

- \$55,000 for residential facades in historic districts
- \$100,000 for commercial properties city-wide
- \$150,000 to NHS for Major Systems

Ms. Kelleher added that this list could also be attached to Codes citations that are mailed out to negligent property owners.

4. Rehabilitation Grants

Mr. Khokhar distributed information on the DCED's Housing and Rehabilitation Assistance Program. Under this program funding to demolish blighted properties can be obtained. The group recognized the need to define a strategic plan that considers attacking the City's blighted housing problem. The committee will meet in a retreat to discuss defining their strategic plan and policy after meeting with the Harrisburg and Allentown Blighted Property Review Committees.

5. BPRC Responsibilities

Ms. Mayfield was asked to draft a list of "Do's and Dont's" that defines the need for the BPRC to undertake or stay away from certain activities, using the chart drafted by Mr. Bealer and BPRC legislation. Mr. Younger stated that this list will be presented at the next meeting.

6. Home Builders Assoc. Programs

Mr. Khokhar reported on his conversation with the Home Builders Association (HBA) President Ron Rohrbach about assisting with the rehabilitation of the

City's blighted properties. Mr. Khokhar suggested inviting Mr. Rohrbach to a future meeting.

Mr. Olsen inquired if Our City Reading (OCR) is still rehabilitating properties. Ms. Kelleher replied that OCR continues to acquire and rehabilitate properties. She noted that OCR transactions are usually found in each Sunday's real estate listings.

List of Questions for Allentown and Harrisburg

Copy of the legislation creating the Blighted Property Review Committee
Funding

How much is budgeted annually for demolition, rehabilitation

How much is budgeted for administrative expenses

Is there a list of programs available to assist property owners with cost of repairs

Are there any partnerships with organizations to assist the Committee and the property owner

Provide a list of available grants (CDBG, State and Federal) used to assist the committee and the property owner

How does the Committee define their scope of work and site selection, i.e. single property, neighborhood or multi-block plan of attack

How much direction comes from the City Administration

Use of eminent domain

How often is eminent domain used

Pros/Cons of eminent domain process

Cost of using eminent domain

How many properties are rehabilitated vs. demolished per year, per decade

Other Business

Mr. Bealer requested that a list of community gardens be obtained from the Conservancy. Mr. Brantley stated that the garden project planned for 2008 is on hold due to lack of sponsors, including a garden planned for Kennedy Towers. A sponsorship costs \$35,000, which includes continued maintenance for the life of the garden.

No further business was brought forward. Mr. Fuhs moved, seconded by Mr. Candelario, to adjourn the meeting.

—Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk

Recap of Follow-up Issues

Update on the inclusion of ADD, community gardens, OCR rehabbed properties, parking lots and demolished properties in the program provided by Great Valley - Mr. Khokhar

Review and summary of Federal Blighted Property Revitalization and Reclamation Act and legislation proposed by Senator Rhodes - Ms. Mayfield

Letter requesting amendment to Federal and State legislation - Ms. Kelleher

List of BPRC "Do's and Dont's" – Ms. Mayfield

Meeting with President of HBA - Mr. Khokhar

List of programs to assist property owners with rehab - Ms. Kelleher

List of community gardens and their location – Mr. Brantley

List of Questions to Allentown and Harrisburg – Ms. Kelleher